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SUBJECT: HISTORIC GREENLANDIC ELECTIONS USHER IN NEW
GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP

REF: A. 08 COPENHAGEN 614

[1](#)B. 07 COPENHAGEN 1010

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Greenlanders, in an historic June 2 election, threw out the ruling party that has held the reins of government in Greenland for the last 30 years. The decisive winner was Greenland's largest left-wing opposition party, which ran a skillful campaign focused on addressing Greenland's many pressing social needs. The election also ratified a generational change in Greenlandic politics, with some of Greenland's most senior politicians pushed into retirement by a younger and better educated slate of newcomers, many of whom were standing for election for the first time. Greenland must now form a government that can deliver on voters' clear desire for change. The election provides the United States with a unique opportunity, as a new generation of Greenlanders steps up, to intensify our engagement with Greenland and shape the attitudes of a political generation that expect in their careers to see Greenland emerge as an independent Arctic nation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Greenlanders went to the polls June 2 in general elections to the Landsting, or Greenlandic Parliament. Although today still a dependent territory of Denmark, Greenland has had a Home Rule Government, drawn from the Landsting, since 1979. Since that time, the Siumut (or "Forward" in Greenlandic) Party has held power in Greenland, either alone or in coalition, and has for those 30 years fielded Greenland's head of its Home Rule Government, the Premier (equivalent to Prime Minister). However, in a decisive break with that past, Greenlanders this week voted Siumut out and handed Greenland's largest left-wing opposition party, Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA, or "Inuit Community") a landslide victory. IA garnered 43.7 percent of the vote, nearly doubling its result from Greenland's last Landsting election in 2005. Siumut captured 26.5 percent of the vote, down from its 2005 result of 30.4 percent. The result gives IA 14 seats in the 31-member Landsting, meaning IA needs only two more seats to form a governing majority of 16 seats.

[1](#)3. (U) IA's decisive win means that Kuupik Kleist, IA's chairman, will become Greenland's next Premier. Kleist has his pick of two potential coalition partners -- the Democrats, who will have four seats in the upcoming Landsting, and Atassut ("Solidarity"), who will have three. The Democrats and Atassut are center-right parties that have in the past sometimes clashed with IA, particularly on economic and business issues. However, before the election both parties indicated their willingness to work with IA in a coalition. Kleist, in the hours following his party's victory, announced that he would under no circumstances allow Siumut into a new IA-led coalition.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Kleist and IA owe their win to a savvy campaign that

both addressed Greenlandic voters' desire for a break with Siumut policies, and brought a young and diverse slate of candidates that injected dynamism into the election debate. Eight of IA's Landsting members will be women, as was half its candidate slate. Siumut, by contrast, was widely criticized even within its own ranks for its small number of women candidates. IA also recruited younger, well-educated Greenlanders in their 20's and 30's to balance against older, more established party members. IA's success was all the more significant in that it performed well not only in Nuuk, the capital, but in Greenland's many small and remote towns and villages, traditional Siumut strongholds.

15. (SBU) Siumut also had the disadvantage of running against its own governing record, which for the past four years has been moribund, particularly on difficult domestic social issues like child poverty and neglect, declining education standards, and an eroding health care system. Siumut not only failed to adequately address these issues, it also throughout the campaign was frequently confronted with one scandal after another, from allegations of corruption and nepotism to abuse of expense accounts to manipulation of Home Rule administered companies. In the end, Siumut seemed unable to muster a coherent political message, leaving the field wide open for IA's better-run, more tightly focused campaign.

16. (SBU) Comment: Kleist now has the difficult task of delivering on the high expectations set by IA during the campaign, and he may choose both the Democrats and Atassut as coalition partners to build the broadest possible majorities for what are likely to be tough fights as IA moves to roll back entrenched Siumut policies and patronage networks. In

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so doing Kleist will no doubt call on a new generation of Greenlanders to offer fresh policies and a more technocratic approach to implementing them. Many of IA's candidates are completely new to politics, and this election offered special significance for them since it is the first Landsting to be seated under Greenland's new Self Governance Agreement with Denmark, which enters into force June 21 (ref A). Young Greenlanders thus see this election as an opportunity to draw a line under 30 years of Siumut rule, and most feel confident that with further economic development they could be the generation that creates an independent Greenland.

17. (SBU) Comment Continued: The election also offers the United States the opportunity to step up its engagement in Greenland, and cement ties to a new generation of Greenlandic political leaders. In an April 23 meeting in Nuuk with Charge, Kleist told us that he values Greenland's emerging ties to the United States and welcomes the opportunity to work with us through fora like the U.S.-Greenland-Denmark Joint Committee. Kleist seemed determined to establish his international credentials with us, noting in fluent English that he had previously led Greenland's nascent Department of Foreign Affairs in the late 1990s, and showing interest in how Greenland could better use other regional fora like the Arctic Council to advance Greenland's interests. Kleist told us he would welcome more educational exchange opportunities with U.S. high schools and universities, and he voiced the hope that USG agencies would continue to commit serious resources to Joint Committee activities. We believe that Kleist is sincere in wanting to maintain a close relationship with the U.S. and we see opportunities to help better inform the views of some of his new Landsting colleagues, whether through vehicles like IV programs or USG technical assistance. Finally, we see the new Greenlandic government as the latest example of why the USG should have at least a seasonal presence on the ground in Nuuk. Our proposal for an American Presence Post, staffed seasonally by Embassy Copenhagen personnel (ref B), would be a relatively low cost, high impact way to enhance our influence with Greenland's new government.

18. (U) Bio Note for Kuupik Kleist. Born Jakob Edvard Kuupik Kleist, March 31, 1958 in Qullissat, Greenland. Attended primary schools in Qullissat and Sisimiut, Greenland. Attended high school in Birkerød Public School in Denmark and received a masters degree in sociology from Roskilde University in Denmark in 1983. Deputy Director of the Greenland Home Rule Government's Department of Education from 1985 - 1988. Director of journalism education in Nuuk from 1988 - 1991. Director and Minister of Home Rule's Department of Foreign Affairs from 1996 - 1999. Political posts include Minister of Public Works and Transport from 1991 - 1995, and Member of the Danish Parliament representing Greenland from 2001 - 2007. Chairman of Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) political party since 2007. Kleist was also a member of the Danish-Greenlandic Self Governance Commission, which drafted the new Self Governance Agreement, from 2004 - 2008. Kleist speaks Greenlandic, Danish, and English. Single, no children. MCCULLEY